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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was distributed to 81 sixth-grade students in an effort to find out the reasons why they chose one book over other books. The 2-item questionnaire was also used to compare reasons given by male and female students to see if there were differences in their responses. Subjects were from 4 classrooms chosen at random from 7 classrooms from a middle school during the 1994-95 school year. The questionnaire asked which book (from a list of 7 books) did the students choose first in the unit on animals and why they chose that book. Results indicated no significant difference--both boys and girls responded that they liked stories about animals. (Contains one table of data and four references. The questionnaire is attached.) (Author/RS)

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# REASONS FOR BOOK SELECTION

## A Survey of Reasons for Book Selection of 6th Grade Students

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## Abstract

An author constructed questionnaire was distributed to 81 sixth grade students in an effort to find out the reasons why they chose one book over other books. The questionnaire was also used to compare reasons given by male and female students to see if there were differences in their responses. Based on this study no significant differences were found, however other available studies have produced contradictory findings. Obviously more research is indicated.

A Survey of Reasons for Book Selection of 6th Grade Students

Purpose

The major purpose of this study was to discover why students in the sixth grade chose to read one book over others and was there a difference between the reasons given based on gender.

Rationale

The results of this research would help determine the way I presented these books next year. I am unhappy with the way our reading program is going and hope to use my findings in improving it.

Previous Studies of Student Reasons

Several articles I found examined the reading interests of middle school students and high school students and offered insight into the complexities of children's gendered literature preferences.

Constance Schultheis (1990) conducted a study on the relationship between gender and reading preferences in high school students. She found that certain types of books were typically more or less appealing to members of one sex or the other.

Deborah Langerman (1990) examined gender preferences and book selection and summarizes studies that have analyzed the reading preferences of boys and girls as well as other topics. She stated that "while we can assume that the reading interests of boys and girls will change as they grow older, we can also assume that changes in society might also affect their interests".

Meredith Cherland (1994) discussed poststructuralist theories and described how they could be useful in explaining children's gendered reading preferences in fiction were "natural". She also felt that we could not afford to let the gender differences in reading literature go unexamined.

Kathleen Isaacs (1992) investigated students' reading choices in a middle school and found that they often chose by author, by genre, size, number of pages, and cover illustration. She also found that these students depended on each other for reading recommendations rather than adults.

Lane Allison (1994) compared the choices of Charlottesville area children with those from Children's Choice lists. She interviewed 62 third to sixth grade students and found that the three most common reasons cited for choosing the books were: (1) the book was exciting, (2) you can learn something from it, and (3) it is fun.

Summary

Clearly these other authors felt that there were differences in children's interests based on gender and that these could change as they grew and that society itself could influence their preferences. Based on that I felt that middle school students be they male or female would have different reasons for choosing a particular book over others.

Major Question/Hypothesis

I wanted to know the reasons why sixth grade students chose one reading book over another. My hypothesis was that girls and boys would give different reasons why they chose a book.

## Method

Subjects

Subjects were chosen from a population of 180 6th grade students enrolled in reading during the school year 1994-95 at Kenton Middle School. Four classes were chosen at random with a class size of approximately 20 students. I used all students present in the four classes. Sample size was 81 with 39 boys and 42 girls.

Measures

A two item questionnaire was constructed by the author (see the appendix for a copy of this questionnaire). The first part asked the students to mark the book they chose first, the second part asked them why they chose that book first. They were to write out their reason. I had them place their name on the questionnaire so I could later separate them by gender.

Validity

I had several teachers study the questionnaire and I asked them what they thought was the purpose of it. They indicated that it was to find out the reasons why boys and girls select a particular book. Also they agreed that I could use it to see if gender played a significant part in the reasons given.

Procedures

Subjects were chose from a population of 180 6th grade students. There were 7 sections of students, 4 sections were chosen at random, totally 81 students of which 39 were male and 42 female. I created a two part questionnaire and explained to each group that I wanted them to complete the questionnaire as honestly as they could because I planned on using their answers in determining how I would set up my reading classes next year. The first part asked them to mark the book they chose first and the second part asked them

why they chose that book first. Since I had them put their names on the questionnaire it was then easy to separate them by gender. I then compiled the reasons given and made a table showing them. I also indicated on the table the number of male and female responses for each reason.

## Results

### Results Given on Reasons

Eighteen reasons were given which I put in Table 1. If they gave more than 1 reason I took just the first one. The number one reason given was "like stories about animals", 46% of the students gave this.

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Place Table 1 about here

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### Results on Responses Based on Gender

Of the original 81 students who were given the questionnaire 3 chose not to complete it. When checking the results I found that 25 out of 42 girls gave the reason "like stories about animals" while 12 boys out of 39 gave this reason. This response showed the biggest difference between boys and girls. When I compared the other responses I found little difference between the number of boys and girls who gave the same reasons.

Results of the chi-square test showed little difference in the reasons given by boys and girls. ($x^2$=26.9, df=35, p<.05) The obtained chi-square value did not exceed the critical value (49.8). Therefore I concluded that there was no significant difference between the reasons given by girls and boys.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicated that both boys and girls gave similar reasons for choosing a book. Therefore my hypothesis that there would be a difference in the reasons given by boys and girls in choosing a book was not supported.

In summary, recent research studies support the premise that boys and girls give different reasons for choosing a book--Isaacs (1992) Langerman (1990). Deborah Langerman (1990) stated that reading interests of boys and girls will change as they grow older, therefore further studies might support my hypothesis that girls and boys give different reasons for choosing a book.

## References

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Cherland, M. (1994). Untangling gender; children, fiction, and useful theory. New Advocate, 7(4), 253-64.

Isaacs, K.T. (1992). "Go ask alice": what middle schoolers choose to read. New Advocate, 5. 129-143.

Langerman, D. (1990). Books & boys: gender preferences and book selection. School Library Journal, 36(3), 132-136.

Table 1

Summary of Students' Responses

| Responses | MALE (n = 39) | | FEMALE (n = 42) | | Total (N = 81) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | N | % | Rank |
| Like Stories About Animals | 12 | 31 | 25 | 60 | 37 | 46 | 1 |
| Sounded/Seemed Really Good | 4 | 10 | 4 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 2 |
| Saw the Movie | 2 | 5 | 4 | 10 | 6 | 7 | 3 |
| It was Interesting | 2 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 4 |
| Cool Looking | 2 | 5 | - | - | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| It was the Smallest | 2 | 5 | - | - | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Liked the Picture on the Cover | 2 | 5 | - | - | 2 | 2 | 7 |
| Other People said it was Good | 2 | 5 | - | - | 2 | 2 | 8 |
| Read it Before but Forgot How it Ended | 1 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 9 |
| Easy Book to Skim Through | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 10 |
| Had Easy Words in It | 1 | 3 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 11 |
| Like the Authors of the Books | 1 | 3 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 12 |
| Thought it Would be Neat and Fun | 1 | 3 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 13 |
| Friends are Reading It | 1 | 3 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 14 |

Table 1 (Continued)

| Responses | MALE (n = 39) | | FEMALE (n = 42) | | Total (N = 81) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | N | % | Rank |
| Just Like to Read | 1 | 3 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 15 |
| It is Famous | 1 | 3 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 16 |
| Sounded Like the Best of All | 1 | 3 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 17 |
| It Looked Nice | - | - | 2 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 18 |

Note: Three Students Chose Not to Complete the Questionnaire

Appendix

READING SURVEY MAY 1995

Name _____

Which book did you choose first in the Animal Unit?

_____ SOUNDER -- Armstrong

_____ THE CALL OF THE WILD -- London

_____ THE BLACK STALLION AND SATAN -- Farley

_____ WHERE THE RED FERN GROWS -- Rawlings

_____ THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY -- Burnford

_____ BLACK BEAUTY -- Sewall

_____ RASCAL -- North

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS BOOK ?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____